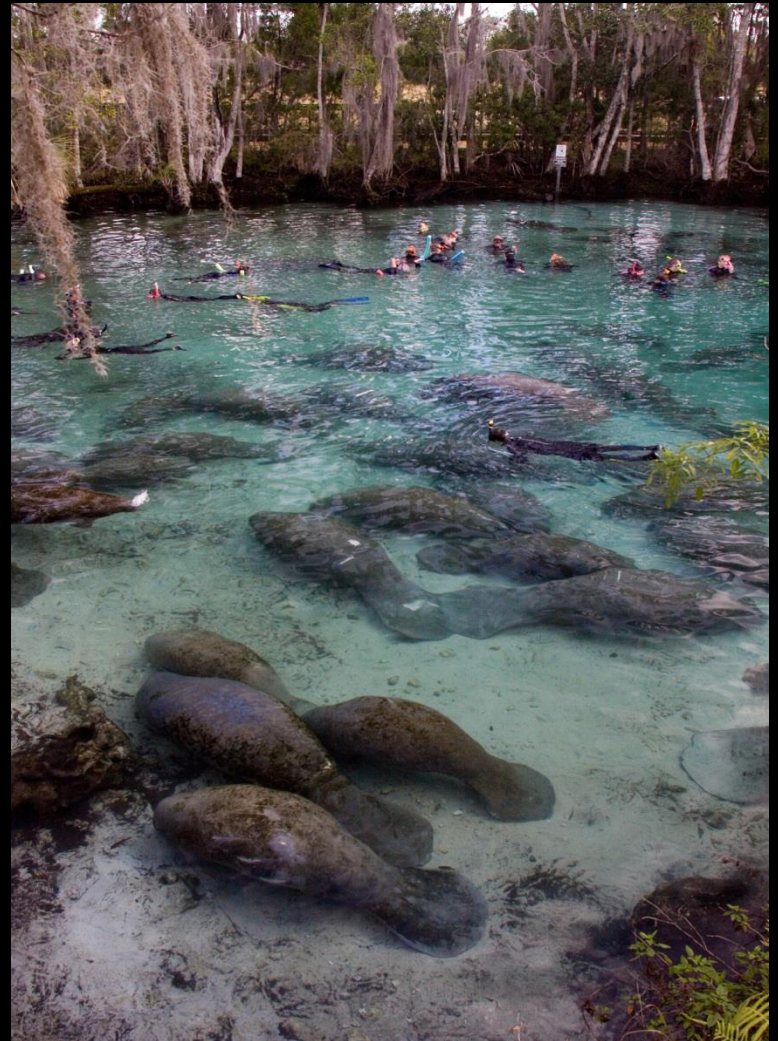


Three Sisters Springs In-Water Draft Environmental Assessment Informational Public Meeting



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's approach:

Ensuring protection of manatees while facilitating a safe, high-quality wildlife viewing experience for “in-water” and “land-based” viewers.



Three Sisters Springs In-Water EA Alternatives:

Alternative A - No Action: Maintains existing management measures manatee season.

Alternative B – Manatee Viewing from Land only: Closing the Springs to all in-water access during the manatee season; providing enhanced land-based manatee viewing opportunities.

Alternative C (PROPOSED) – Limited In-water Viewing:

Enhance manatee protections, while allowing for limited, guided in-water manatee viewing, and enhanced land-based wildlife viewing opportunities for visitors.

Three Sisters Springs, Manatee Season 2015 and beyond

Crystal River NWR has identified new management measures in this Environmental Assessment (EA), based on:

- Analysis of monitoring study data and recent measures implemented.
- Assessment of the manatees preferred resting areas inside Three Sisters Springs.
- Assessment of manatee movements in and out of Three Sisters Springs.
- Assessment of visitor crowding and viewing behavior inside the Springs.
- Community feedback from the 2011 and 2013 workshops.



Alternative C - Proposed Measures

- Provide limited, daily, in-water wildlife viewing opportunities (snorkeling only) to visitors via a floating dock and ramp attached to the boardwalk.
- Require all in-water visitors access to Springs through selected SUP holders only.
- Close the spring run to all visitor access to the Springs.



Alternative C -Proposed Measures (cont.)



- Special Use Permits (SUPs) issued for commercial wildlife viewing tour operators to 5 or less.
- Limiting the number of snorkelers to 4 per certified guide (20 guided snorkelers total).
- 1 group (guide + up to 4 snorkelers) per SUP holder will be allowed in the Springs at any time.
- Guided visits conducted between 9 AM and 4 PM except during closures.

Alternative C - Proposed Measures (cont.)

- Amending SUP conditions for commercial wildlife observation guides requiring specific stipulations:
 - A City of Crystal River business license or exemption letter.
 - In-water insurance.



Alternative C - Proposed Measures (cont.)

- Certify guides through a standardized certification program.
- Guides attend a 2-day training provided by Crystal River NWR.



Alternative C - Proposed Measures (cont.)

- Institute a standard of conduct for SUP holders, guides, and in-water visitors that supports and promotes reasonable, responsible, sustainable wildlife viewing.
 - No initiating contact with manatees.
 - Minimum of 6 feet approach of resting, feeding, or nursing manatees.



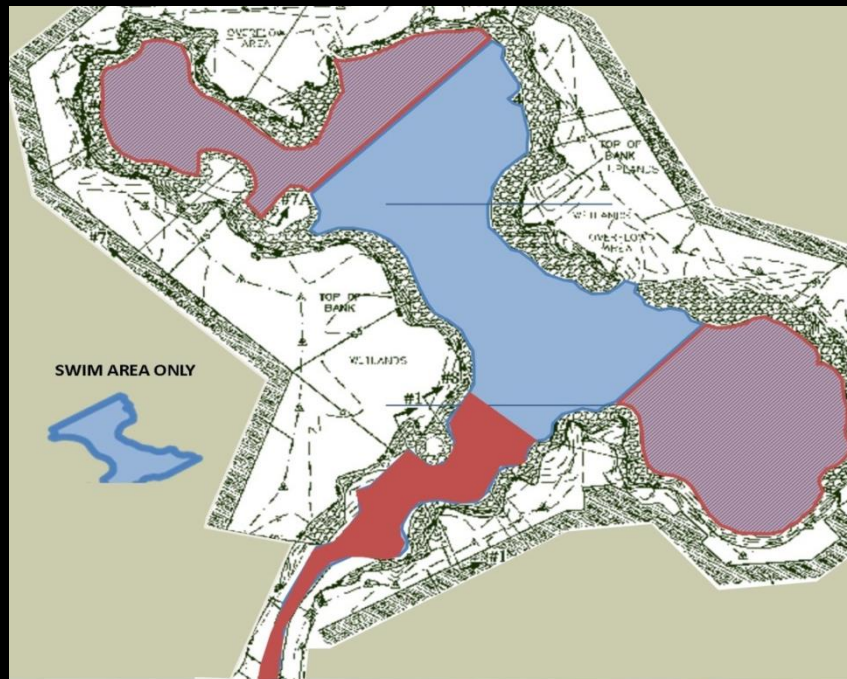
Alternative C - Proposed Measures (cont.)

- Requiring all in-water visitors to only wear (non-intrusive) black wet suits.
- Prohibit fins.



Alternative C - Proposed Measures (cont.)

- Closing two lobes (Pretty Sister and Little Sister) and portion of the spring run to all in-water access, as necessary, during manatee season, and as needed in response to key environmental factors, or at the discretion of Refuge management.



Alternative C Proposed Measures (cont.)

- Limit the number of SUPs issued for commercial photographers, videographers, filmmakers (filmmers).
- Implementation of lottery system requiring commercial filming companies to submit an application, during an open application period.
- 2 guided filmers would be allowed in the water to view manatees with a maximum of two per certified guide.



Alternative C - Proposed Measures (cont.)

- Commercial filming SUPs would be issued for a 1 week period at 3-4 hour intervals per day (from 8AM to 12PM or 1PM to 5PM on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday and from 10AM to 1PM or 1PM to 4PM Friday, Saturday, and Sunday).
- Applicants would have the option to request a maximum of two consecutive weeks per viewing season.
- Flash photography would be prohibited.
- All Standards of Conduct, except not sinking below the surface, would apply.

Alternative C - Proposed Measures (cont.)

- Building an elevated viewing platform to enhance wildlife viewing.
- Make the boardwalk compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Prohibit pets on the boardwalk.



Proposed Application Process

(if Alternative C is selected)

- In-water Guiding Services
 - Interested parties would submit an application to include:
 - Operations plan
 - Viewing experience
 - Safety plan
 - Etc.
 - Evaluation of application packages by committee
 - Selection of SUP holders
 - Guide training and certification by FWS



Proposed Application Process

(if Alternative C is selected)

- Examples of possible Operation Plan factors:
 - Customer Services
 - Facilities
 - Equipment
 - Staffing
 - Transportation



Proposed Application Process

(if Alternative C is selected)

- Examples of possible Viewing Experience factors:
 - In-water staffing
 - In-water protocol and procedures



Proposed SUP Application Process

(if Alternative C is selected)

- Examples of possible Safety factors:
 - Safety Orientation
 - Emergency Procedures



Proposed Application Process

(if Alternative C is selected)

- Photography/Videography/Filming
 - Submit an application with preferred dates/times
 - Lottery to select applicants
 - Preferred dates/times available until filled



Next Steps

- The EA released on August 5, 2015 with a 30-day public comment period ending September 4, 2015.
- Public feedback via written comments emailed to crystalriver@fws.gov on substantive issues covered under this EA.
- At the close of the comment period, the FWS will review your comments and identify those measures that may be implemented during the upcoming and future manatee seasons.



Questions ?

crystalriver@fws.gov

Comment period open until
4 September 2015